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ABSTRACT

A participatory research study analyzed adult lifelong learning in voluntary association. Examined in the study were the associational environment for learning, learning leadership, learning goals and objectives, program content, and skill development. To obtain these data, researchers administered a mail questionnaire to a stratified random sample of 270 associations drawn from a universe of 3,050 Atlantic Canadian organizations. Based on data from 220 completed questionnaires, followup interviews, and field observations, researchers concluded that nonformal learning in voluntary association is dissimilar in both structure and content when compared to formal group learning. Because the teaching function is frequently exchanged among the learners with small-group skill practice sessions, the hierarchical nature of teacher-student is minimized. Learning generally focuses on very specific behavioral change with less regard for a knowledge base and virtually no regard for a clarification of the value premises inherent in the behavior. Using data obtained during the survey, researchers constructed a model of adult associational learning. The model consisted of a taxonomy of environment, leadership process, objective, and skill development descriptors. Recommendations called for field testing the model and exploring the synergistic educational relationship between the learning leader and the learning member. (MN)

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LIFE-LONG LEARNING IN VOLUNTARY ASSOCIATION
A STUDY OF NON-FORMAL EDUCATION IN ATLANTIC CANADA

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October 1, 1982

Abstract

This participatory research study analyzes the four dimensions of adult life-long learning in voluntary association. A stratified random sample of 270 associations is drawn from a universe of 3050 Atlantic Canadian organizations. Thirty associations representing each of 9 instrumental or expressive transformational objectives are surveyed. Follow-up field observations are carried out with 2 associations representing each objective. Item analysis and cross-tabulations are carried out; statistical significance is not determined. The associational environment, organizational purpose, activities and leadership are described and a non-formal education model is constructed. The voluntary association provides a local and personalized learning environment for adults to acquire new knowledge and practice new skills. Associations with welfare-related goals learn instrumental behavior, while those with leisure goals learn expressive behavior. Welfare includes social, economic, nature and health goals, while leisure includes recreation, sport, creative arts and culture. Each type of association is descretely described with three significant learning objectives. Small group and individual skill practice activities dominate the learning experience. Knowledge acquisition is considered an important condition to learning, and it is provided for in the program. Values clarification is assumed as a pre-condition to group affiliation. Inherent in all group learning experiences is the development of leadership. The synergistic quality of associational learning makes the development of leadership inherent in all group skill building experiences.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Atlantic Canada has a long tradition of voluntary community action. People in this region have sought to meet their welfare and leisure needs through associating with like-minded persons. As voluntary participants they have invested their time, energy and resources in the enrichment of themselves as well as their community. In all likelihood all the readership of this brief article have been involved, at one time or another, in a community development activity. Individuals are probably both alturistic and selfish in their associational participation; not only are they helping others meet their objectives, but they are also effectively meeting their own. Most members of voluntary associations participate because they are seeking to improve, or change, some knowledge, attitude or physical skill that is perceived as important to successfully developing their lifestyle.

Learning in voluntary association can conveniently be defined as:

WHAT: People voluntarily cluster; invest wealth, time & creative energy to reach a common goal.

WHERE: In informal & non-formal social settings found in a community environment.

WHY: To meet a personal &/or community need &/or address a significant issue.

WHEN: During leisure, discretionary time.

WHO: Adults who are high achievers leading adults who are high affiliators; the leadership role passing from member to members as the skill develoment needs of the group are periodically redefined.

HOW: New information causes a revision of attitude resulting in a behavior enhancement amongst small groups of adults practicing the appropriate skills; through a dynamic interactive process of continuous refinement of focus (goal setting) in a participative appraisal process.

II. PROBLEM

Coping with change is a life-long human development process. Nothing remains static within a human's environment. There is a continuous, although uneven, flow of informative stimuli being received which signal a transforming environmental milieu. The human responds to such stimuli by exhibiting either instrumental or expressive behavior. Often the response is reflexive and

requires little or no awareness. At other times the human response is reflective with a conscious decision being made to behave with a perscribe complex of psycho-motor response. Such complex behaviors were probably learned informally within the family or amongst friends, through formal schooling or as an adult in non-formal learning experiences undertaken in voluntary association with other similarly motivated people wanting to learn the same skills.

An analysis of the non-formal educative characteristics of the voluntary learning association is necessary in order to understand more fully the instrumental and expressive transformation of adults.

III. PURPOSE

The general objective of this study is to create a model which describes the interrelationship of non-formal educative elements found in the adult voluntary association. The specific objectives are to analyze the associational:

- environment for learning
- learning leadership
- learning goals
- learning objectives
- - content
- - skill development

IV. METHODOLOGY

A. Participatory Research

The basic premise of this study is that generalizable concepts can be arrived at only through a quasi-inductive validation process where particular empirical evidence is derived from numerous human sources. Through a process of categorizing sub-sets and sets of adult learning experiences in voluntary associations as described by the learners themselves a universal model of non-formal transformational behavior is synthesized. Such a process assumes that dynamic learning relationships contradictory to deductive logic will always exist, and that the model itself will continually undergo modification. The participatory method of research assumes that in the act of inquiry all participants undergo change which necessarily impinges on the investigation.

B. Survey Strategy

A stratified random sample of 270 associations were drawn from a universe of 3050 similar Atlantic Canadian organizations archived in the Department of Adult Education's inventory. Thirty associations representing each of 9 instrumental or expressive transformational objectives were surveyed by mail questionaire with 220 cases responding. Follow-up interviews and field observation were carried out with two associations from each of

the nine objective areas. The survey identified a glossary of terms related to skill training, environmental conditions, process activities and teaching interventions. Item analysis and cross-tabulation proceedures were carried out; statistical significance was not determined. Subsequently, a model of adult learning in voluntary association was created.

V. FINDINGS

A. Environment

The typical association of voluntary learners sampled did not segragate either according to age grade or sexual solidarity. Leadership was, however, more frequently male. The geographic radius of activity and membership was most frequently the town and county; the second demension was the province. The association generally designated a permanent locale, but few actually owned their own centre. Although the voluntary association is considered to be ostensibly independent, most received external support.

Table 1

AGE GRADE		SEX	Member	Leader
20-30	3.6%	Male	6.8%	56.8%
30-60	3.2	Female	4.6	43.2
65+	.9	Mixed	88.6	
All	92.3			
	100.0%		100.0%	100.0%

GEOGRAPHIC COVERAGE		LOCALE	
Neighborhood	1.4%	Permanent	72.7%
Town/County	51.4	Variable	20.0
District (2+ T/C)	5.0	Centre	7.3
Province	33.2		
Region	8.6		
National	.5		
	100.0%		100.0%

ORGANIZATION STRUCTURE		FINANCIAL SUPPORT	
Association	85.0	Donation, Subsidy	21.4
Federation	13.2	Membership Dues	33.2
Council	1.8	Both	45.5
	100.0%		100.0%

The target population important to the association is neither the larger community nor the individual, per se; it is the learning group with success being measured by their collective achievement of the learning objective.

Table 2

TARGET POPULATION Priority:	Low	2	High	
Community	51.4	18.4	30.0	100.0%
Individual	25.0	39.1	35.9	100.0%
Group	23.6	42.3	74.1	100.0%
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

B. Activities

The association's learning activities most frequently selected are related to actually doing something rather than discussing the doing.

Table 3

LEARNING ACTIVITIES Priorities:	Low	2	3	4	High
Community Education	67.3	21.4	10.0	1.4	0.0
General Assembly	24.5	39.1	15.5	10.9	10.0
Large Group Meeting	7.3	35.0	50.0	7.3	.5
Individual Skill Practice	.5	1.4	19.5	65.0	13.6
Small Group Skill Practice	.9	4.5	5.0	13.6	75.9
	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0%

C. Goals

When describing learning in voluntary association it is necessary to generalize upon how the participants are behaving. Although the data was assembled from the particular to the general, it will be presented inversely.

All learning can be described as either instrumental or expressive behavior change. The voluntary associations tend to favor the habilitation of instrumental behavior when compared with the creation of expressive behavior.

Table 4

LEARNING	
Instrumental behavior change	59.9%
Expressive behavior change	40.1
	100.0%

A comparison of the cognitive, psycho-motor and affective priorities of voluntary association learning suggests that knowledge acquisition is most important; motor skill development follows, and values clarification is least important.

Table 5

LEARNING DOMAIN Priority:	Low	2	High
Knowledge acquisition	0.0	28.6	71.4
Skill Development	10.5	62.7	26.8
Values Clarification	89.5	8.6	1.8
	100.0	100.0	100.0

The voluntary association is also known for its social development potential; this is confirmed with leadership training as being a high priority as a human learning goal.

Table 6

SOCIAL LEARNING Priority:	Low	2	High
Informal Social Interaction	96.4	1.4	2.3
Interpersonal Communications	2.3	80.0	17.7
Leadership Training	1.4	18.6	80.0
	100.0	100.0	100.0%

D. Objectives

Goals provide a framework for general and specific objectives. Associations which focus on instrumental behavior change are primarily concerned with human welfare. Social and Economic development, Nature/environment, and Health are sub-sets of the Welfare set. Similarly, expressive behavior change is the focus of associations concerned with human creativity. Recreation, Sport, Tradition and Art are sub-sets of the Creativity set. When given a choice of three general objectives Recreation, Social and Economic development were most frequently selected.

Table 7

GENERAL LEARNING OBJECTIVES

[Welfare-related] Instrumental Behavior		[Creativity] Expressive Behavior	
Social development	22.7%	Recreation	40.0%
Economic development	17.3	Sport	15.2
Nature/environment	14.1	Tradition	14.1
Health	13.6	Art	13.2

Critical to associational learning with others is the explicit recreational dimension. Learning must be fun !

Around each general objective cluster specific learning objectives. The most frequently specified for a given association uniquely identity it as belonging to that general objective. The following matrix correlates the 8 general objectives to the 3 most frequently chosen specific objectives for each.

Table 8

SPECIFIC LEARNING OBJECTIVES

	Social	Economic	Nature/E	Health	Sport	Recreation	Art	Tradition
Communication	36.0							
Service others	72.0							
Stability	52.0							
Group mobility		28.9						
Individual "		28.9						
Vocational		55.2	29.0					
Animal husband			67.7					
Plant culture			61.2					
Infirm				83.3				
Disabled				63.3				
Physical fitness				30.0	47.0			
Competitive play					100.0	35.2		
Hobbies					47.8	69.4	44.8	
Games						36.3		
Fine art							41.3	
Folk art							27.5	
Ethnic folk practice								32.2
Folklore, history								32.2
Spiritual development								54.3

VI. LEARNING MODEL

- Environment
  - Fellowship
    - Solidarity
    - Cooperation
    - Affiliation
  - Prestige
  - Special interest
  - Autonomy
    - Competition
    - Achievement
  - Age grade
    - Aged
    - Adult
    - Young adult
    - Youth
  - Sex
    - Male
    - Female

- Leadership
  - Teach
    - Train
    - Instruct
    - Facilitate
  - Intervene
    - Counsel
    - Motivate
    - Stabilize
  - Inform
    - Conscientize
    - Awareness training
  - Problem solve
  - Organize
  - Manage

- Instrumental habilitation
  [Welfare-related]
  - Social privilege (protective)
    - Functional stability
      - Service
    - Dysfunctionality
      - Communicative
  - Economic power (exploitive)
    - Advantaged
      - Vocational
      - Individual mobility
    - Disadvantaged
      - Group mobility
    - Natural
      - Animal husbandry
      - Plant culture
      - Environmental
  - Health (adaptive)
    - Disabled
      - Physical
      - Mental
    - Infirm
      - Chronic
      - Acute
    - Fitness

- Creative expression
  [Leisure-related]
  - Sportive
    - Competitive play
      - Individual
      - Team
  - Recreative
    - Hobby
    - Game
  - Artistic
    - Fine
    - Folk
      - Dramatic
      - Audio
      - Visual
      - Literary
      - Handcraft
  - Traditional
    - Ethnic
    - Historic
    - Spiritual

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VII. CONCLUSIONS

A. Summary

There are four dimensions to associational learning: Environment, Leadership, Activities, and Learning Goals/Objectives. Within these dimensions the present study described the several interrelated elements.

Non-formal learning in voluntary association is dissimilar in both structure and content when compared to formal group learning. While there obviously exists a relationship of teacher and students virtually all the conventional control and reward systems of formal schooling are displaced by ones that appear more appropriate to the adult learner. Participation is more readily assured by the voluntary nature of the program. Will or drive to learn is the result of an apparent felt need to learn. The teaching function is frequently exchanged amongst the learners within small group skill practice sessions. The heirarchial nature of teacher-student is minimized.

Learning generally focuses on very specific behavioral change with less regard for a knowledge base and virtually no regard for a clarification of the value premises inherent in the behavior. It is assumed that the learner's affective identification with the new behavior is a precondition to entry into the learning. Enhancement of behavior is equated with learning; it is the active practice of discrete behavior patterns.

Although associational learning informally meets a wide spectrum of human needs within a single organization each can be uniquely described through a taxonomy of environment, leadership process, objective and skill development descriptors.

B. Recommendations

It is necessary to take this Model of life-long non-formal learning in voluntary association and test it back in the field. Only by conducting a series of educational ethnographies using the model as a mapping device can the substance of learning in voluntary association be validated.

A second recommendation is to explore the synergistic educational relationship between the learning leader and the learning member.